

## NOVEL

乃木若葉は  
勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）

執筆：朱白あおい イラスト：BUNBUN 監修：Project 2H

ウルトラ怪獣  
擬人化計画

設定・原案・シリーズ構成：海法紀光

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イラスト：ハルオ

原作・監修：円谷プロダクション

## ガーリッシュ ナンバー

著：渡 航

キャラクター原案・カラーイラスト：QP:flapper

モノクロイラスト：聖本翔貴



The Shinju-sama is apparently a conglomeration of land gods.

But some gods who were [REDACTED] ed from [REDACTED]

are mixed alongside them as well.

It's quite reassuring to think about.

Hero Record Aug 2019 AD

Takashima Yuuna's Record

# 第十八話

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根絶  
(前編)



企画原案・シリーズ構成／

**タカヒロ** (みなとそふと)

執筆／朱白あおい

イラスト／BUNBUN

パッケージデザイン／D.K&JWORKS

監修／Project 2H

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"Haah, whew... Hmmm, I think I've got the hang of it again!"

"Yeah, your stamina's back to how it was before you were in the hospital."

Yuuna and Wakaba finished running laps around the Marugame Castle grounds and took a breather at the inner citadel. Yuuna's stamina had dropped due to her long stay in the hospital, but she fully regained it in about a month's time.

"Here, have some of Hinata's special sports drink. You need to stay hydrated."

"Okay!"

Yuuna took the bottle from Wakaba and drank from it.

It was the dead of the summer. Wakaba and Yuuna had only run a little bit, but they were both drenched in sweat. Their gym uniforms clung to their skin. A cacophony of cicadas shook the surrounding trees.

After Yuuna finished drinking, Wakaba retrieved the bottle and put her lips to it. A sweet, yet slightly sour taste spread through her mouth.

"Oh right, Wakaba-chan, did you hear the news?"

"Hmm? What news?"

"The barrier fortification thing."

"Oh... that Taisha plan, huh?"

At the end of July, an oracle was received foretelling an imminent Vertex invasion.

But the Taisha had still not yet found any way to counter the colossal Vertex still fusing outside the barrier. The oversized monster was slowly, yet steadily growing as if to sneer at humanity from the shadows.

Furthermore, additional giant Vertexes were confirmed outside the barrier as well. Several at the same scale as the Scorpion-type had appeared.

For over a month, the Vertexes had held back on invading Shikoku, likely biding their time to grow the giant Vertexes outside the barrier. According to the Shinju's oracle, the enemy would soon complete its battle preparations and go on an all-out invasion of Shikoku.

The Taisha had still not found a countermeasure for those giant Vertexes. Yuuna's use of Shuten-Doji was a near-suicidal double-edged sword, and thus could hardly be considered an effective strategy at all.

But according to the Taisha, as long as humanity could overcome this next attack, they would be able to prepare two countermeasures to keep the enemy invasion in check.



The first of such countermeasures was fortification of the barrier, a measure that had been in the planning stages for some time.

After finishing the drink, Wakaba gazed at the sea from the stone castle wall. The sea, the summery sky, and the Shinju's barrier spread out in the distance.

Though it wasn't visible from inside the barrier, the colossal Vertex was still there. A visual blockade applied to the barrier had erased its image, but not its presence.

"Apparently they're strengthening the barrier's actual defense this time, and not just the visual blockade..."

"They've going at it with a whole buncha rituals and stuff to prepare, too."

"Yeah. Looks like it'll take a few months, but... once it's done, the Vertexes won't be able to invade so easily anymore."

"Yeah. But... what do you think the 'other' countermeasure could be?"

Yuuna tilted her head.

Neither Wakaba, nor Yuuna, nor even Hinata had been told what exactly the Taisha's "other" countermeasure was. That uncertainty made Wakaba a little uneasy. Why would the Taisha keep the details of a "countermeasure" so secret--?

"... Anyway, if we win the next battle, we can enact all the countermeasures we want! That way the Vertexes won't be able to come in anymore. Peace at last!"

Yuuna spoke with a bright voice.

That proactive tone helped Wakaba shake off her anxiety.

"You're right."

Gigantic white columns of clouds formed in the faraway sky.

If the Taisha's words were to be believed, the next battle would be the last. A battle full of despair, with nothing to rely on but the small glimmer of hope on the other side.

Yuuna and Wakaba spent their time preparing. They continued their martial arts and basic stamina training, making sure to take sufficient breaks and maintaining proper nutrition.

In preparation for the next battle, Wakaba formally requested the Taisha iron out the hero system's forced cancellation behavior.

In Chikage's final moments... if her hero system did not cancel itself, she may have had a path to survival. No matter what situation the heroes found themselves in, they would support each other and try to find a way to make it through with their own strength. Getting robbed of their powers would do nothing to help their chances.



"The will of the Shinju-sama aside, I would prefer that forced cancellation not occur. I implore you to put your trust in us" -- Her request was accepted and the hero system was updated.

In addition to the training, breaks, and hero system improvement, there was one other preparation Wakaba needed to make.

Preparation to imbue her body with a powerful fairy-- a heretofore forbidden fairy on the same level as Yuuna's Shuten-Doji.

After her training with Yuuna, Wakaba returned to her room to be greeted by none other than Hinata.

"Now then, let's begin today's study time!"

Various books were piled on top of her desk: old sun-faded books; watoji, books stab-bound in the traditional Japanese way; and orihon, folding accordion books... All of the literature pertained to legendary myths and miracles.

Hinata had gathered them all.

"Ugh... Another big haul today, huh. Is this really all necessary?"

"The more you familiarize yourself with its literature, the stronger your grasp on the fairy's image becomes... Which makes it easier for you to imbue yourself with its power. That's what the Taisha members have told you, right?"

"Well, yeah, but..."

For the next battle, Wakaba was to imbue her body with a fairy rivaling Shuten-Doji. And for such a task, there was no such thing as too much preparation.

Wakaba wasn't at all adverse to reading, but she had already finished reading all the major literary works. All the books Hinata had been bringing in lately were fragile antiques. The actual content was antiquated as well, with nigh-illegible cursive handwriting and archaic grammar. Wakaba could hardly "decipher" the text, much less "read" it. Hinata was helping to "decipher" it, but--

"I trained with Yuuna today, so I'm tired... I really don't want to read books anymore..."

"Oh my. So practice time with Yuuna-san's more important than study time with me, Wakaba-chan?"

"If you cleaned my ears and let me lie on your lap, that might motivate me..."

"What am I ever going to do with you... Okay, sure"

"Mmm!"

Hinata laid Wakaba on her lap and started cleaning Wakaba's ears.

"Haahooh... so relaxing..."

"Wakaba-chan, you're making such an unsightly face right now."

"Mmm... but... there's nobody here... but you and me, Hinata... so who cares~..."

The door swung open.

"Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan, about tomorrow--"

It was Yuuna. She took one look at Wakaba and Hinata and froze for just a second before beginning to gently close the door.

"Sorry. I'll come back later."

"Wait, Yuuna! It's okay! Now's fine!"

Wakaba stopped Yuuna from leaving and brought her inside the room.

"Uugh, I'm so sorry... I let my guard down and let you see an unsightly side of me... I'm a disgrace as a warrior..."

"D-don't worry about it! I never imagined seeing you like that, so I was just a teensy bit surprised, that's all. I'm the one who should apologize for barging in like that."

Yuuna comforted the depressed Wakaba.

Hinata smiled at the two of them with a chuckle here and an "oh my" there.

"Personally, I think you're cute with a lax smile like that, Wakaba-chan."

"H-Hinata!!"

Hinata ignored Wakaba's death glare to ask Yuuna a question.

"By the way, did you need something?"

"Oh yeah! Guys, wanna go out tomorrow?"

"Hmm? Well, tomorrow's a break from training, so I don't see why not."

"Count me in as well."

It was summer break, so there were no classes, leaving their daily schedules free outside of training and preparing for the next battle.

"Okay, that settles it then!"

And thus, at Yuuna's suggestion, the three of them planned to go out the next day.

"So it's a three-way date, then," Hinata mused.



The next day, the girls decided to meet in front of Marugame Castle's Oteichinomom Gate. Hinata reached the rendezvous point first and waited for Wakaba and Yuuna.

"That's strange. Wakaba-chan's usually at least ten minutes early for meetups..."

Just as that thought crossed Hinata's mind, Wakaba appeared.

"Sorry for the wait!"

"No, it's okay, you're still early, so... Wait, what are you wearing?"

Wakaba wore a baseball cap and jeans, accessorized with oversized sunglasses covering her eyes, a large surgical mask enveloping her mouth, and her sword in hand.

"It's a disguise. It's too conspicuous for a hero to be walking around town in the open. So I did my best to pick out clothes that would blend in and hide the fact that it's me. But I just couldn't part with my sword. Might need it in case of emergency."

"... Wakaba-chan..."

Hinata glanced at Wakaba with squinted eyes as Yuuna showed up.

"You two sure got here early!"

"Ah, Yuuna-san... wait, what is that?"

Yuuna was wearing a mask. Not a surgical mask, but a tokusatsu TV show hero mask like the ones you can buy at festivals.

"It's a disguise! You know, so that the citizens can't tell we're the heroes!"

Hinata placed her hands on Wakaba's and Yuuna's shoulders.

"Guys... you're not allowed to dress like that on a 'date'."

In the end, Hinata ended up re-coordinating Wakaba and Yuuna's wardrobe choices before they headed out. However, Wakaba would not let go of her sword, swearing "It's for emergencies! Emergencies! Just in case!" so Hinata gave up on that front.

Once they left the Marugame Castle grounds, they tried walking in busy areas. Though passersby took notice of the girls, they didn't cause a commotion.

"Wakaba-chan, Yuuna-chan, you two might be famous, but it's not like you're doing anything wrong, so just keep your chins up."

"Ahahah, you're right."

"Perhaps I've gotten a bit too tense."

Yuuna and Wakaba spoke sheepishly.

"By the way, Yuuna, is there anywhere in particular you'd like to go?"

"Nope, not exactly... I just kinda wanted to walk in town with you two. Am I bothering you?"

Hinata and Wakaba smiled.

"Not at all. I think it's a great idea. We should relax every now and then."

"Yeah. Even if we don't have anywhere to go in particular, we're friends, so we can have fun wherever we go."

From Marugame Castle, the girls somewhat aimlessly headed toward Marugame Station.

From Oteichinomom Gate, they went through the main street, past the city office, and into the shopping district.

The shopping district was busy and bustling. Four years ago, Shikoku's population spiked due to the influx of refugees from Honshu and Kyushu. As a result, the areas around the shopping district and the station were always crowded.

Throughout the shopping district, they saw posters for the "Marugame Basara Matsuri" held at the end of August.

"It's already festival time, huh."

"Yes. Looks like it'll be extravagant again this year."

The Marugame Basara Matsuri was the biggest festival held inside the city, rivaling the Marugame Castle Matsuri held in May. There's a fireworks display held during the Basara Matsuri, attracting many visitors from out of town.

"But... what exactly does the "Basara" part mean? Isn't that a game?"

Yuuna quizzically asked as she looked at the poster.

"Apparently it originates from the Kyogoku clan, the lords of Marugame in the Edo period. The ancestor of the Kyogoku clan, Sasaki Doyo, was also known as 'Basara Daimyo'. Basara meaning 'showy' or 'elegant'."

"Wow, Wakaba-chan, you sure know your stuff~!"

"Well, it's because I've lived here for a long time. It's local history."

Wakaba spoke plainly, without much pride.

'Actually,' Hinata thought to herself, 'most people our age aren't that familiar with local history.'





As they passed through a general store in the shopping district, some hand fans for sale caught Yuuna's eye.

"Ah, handmade hand fans!"

Marugame City was the number one producer of hand fans in Japan, making expertly crafted handmade hand fans something of a brand there. The three girls bought hand fans and started walking in the shopping district again.

"Mmm... walking around like this with hand fans out, it feels like something's missing..."

Hinata furrowed her eyebrows in thought.

Wakaba had a bad feeling about this.

"Oh, right! Hand fans in the summer go hand in hand with yukata. Wakaba-chan, Yuuna-san, let's go buy yukata and wear them around!"

"N-no, it's weird to wear a yukata when there isn't even a festival going on, isn't it?"

"Y-yeah, what she said... maybe next time."

Wakaba and Yuuna responded, overwhelmed by Hinata's enthusiasm.

"That's too bad... Then when the festival comes, I'll pick the best yukata for both of you. I can't wait." Hinata rambled expectantly.

Afterwards, they walked around the shopping district and ate udon.

They passed through Marugame Station and headed towards the ocean. The path from the station to the was part of a street called Marugame-Kaido which connects Marugame Port to Kagawa's most famous shrine, Konpira-gu. Edo period pilgrims would use Marugame-Kaido to visit Konpira-gu.

"Konpira-gu, huh... Now that I think about it, I visited a shrine a lot as a kid."

"You visited regularly? Not too many do."

"Yeah. It wasn't as big as something like Kompira-gu, though."

Yuuna spoke as they walked.

"Now that I think about it, Yuuna-san, we haven't heard much about you from before you came to Marugame."

"True. You always prioritize others above yourself, Yuuna. You're such a good listener that you'd rather listen to others than talk about yourself. That's a rare trait."

"You're so considerate, Yuuna-san. It's a wonderful quality. That's probably why everyone loves you."

Yuuna swallowed her words halfway and spoke no more.

The sun had already started to set by the time they had reached the beach. The sky was dyed a madder red and the ferries anchored to the port looked somehow sad.

Yuuna looked towards the sun setting over the ocean as she began to speak.

"The truth is, that part of me is nothing praiseworthy at all."

Wakaba and Hinata looked at Yuuna with puzzled looks.

"People tell me I'm considerate all the time, but... there's nothing praiseworthy about it. I just... hate... getting into arguments or raising tensions between people... That's why I'm always listening... and never talk about myself. But--"

The usually bright girl, the considerate peacemaker and moodmaker among the heroes-- Takashima Yuuna turned toward Wakaba and Hinata with her back facing the setting sun. Her facial expression looked just a little bit lonely.

"I know it's too late now... but I feel kinda sad... that I never talked about myself with Tama-chan, An-chan, or Gun-chan... I really should have..."

"Yuuna..."

"So Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan... I want you to know more. About me."

Wakaba and Hinata gently gazed at Yuuna and nodded.

"Yeah, please tell us more about you. Everything you want to tell us."

"I want to know more about you too, Yuuna-san."

"... Thanks."

Yuuna smiled and spoke somewhat nervously, as if introducing herself for the first time.

"I, Takashima Yuuna, am a hero. I'm from Nara. My birthday is January 11. Blood type A. My hobby is... martial arts, I guess? Oh, and I like eating yummy food too. Before I became a hero... when I was a kid, I loved playing outside. I'd also go to shrine near home and help clean as a volunteer, or just play inside the grounds. You see, shrine grounds are perfect for playing hide and seek. There are sooo many places to hide. But the shinto priests would get mad at me when I'd go into off-limit areas."

Yuuna endlessly reminisced about herself while Wakaba and Hinata quietly listened.

"So I was really close to the shrine and the shinto priests... and maybe that's why I adapted to the whole Taisha thing more naturally than everyone else."

"So, Yuuna-san, you spent your time at the shrine as a kid and you were more rambunctious, huh."

"Rambunctious...? Hmm, maybe a bit."



Yuuna blushed just a little.

As she watched Yuuna, Hinata something the Taisha priests told her during her miko training-- Invisible things like purity, corruption, and divine might and mystery would accumulate within the human body through contact. According to what is known in cultural anthropology as "contagious magic", there is a law which states that once two things come in contact with each other, they continue to influence each other even after they have been separated. That law is derived from how those invisible things accumulate in the human body. Yuuna's continued childhood contact with the shrine environment perhaps had some influence on her power as a hero.

"But I wasn't as much of an outdoorsman as Tama-chan, or as smart as An-chan, or anything. I was really plain. So I was surprised when I became a hero. 'Why me?' I thought. I was afraid of fighting.

But... I was even more afraid of losing my friends and family. You see... the truth is, I'm fighting because I'm afraid... I'm a coward."

Perhaps that was why she admired the word 'hero'-- Yuuna smiled wryly.

Afterwards, Yuuna spoke a lot about herself. Things that happened to her in kindergarten and elementary school, her old friends, and her family...

After a long while talking, Yuuna sighed a breath of relief.

"I think this might have been the most I've talked in my life."

Wakaba and Hinata smiled.

"I'm glad you told us so much about yourself, Yuuna."

"Yes. I feel like I know you a lot better now, Yuuna-san. ... So in return, let me tell you more about Wakaba-chan."

"Huh? More about me? Not yourself?"

Hinata continued unperturbed,

"Yes. You see, ever since Wakaba-chan was little, she's been a diligent hard-worker. A little TOO diligent. So much so that it frightened those around her, see. But she's cute when she works herself up about that fact."

"Wha- s-stop that, Hinata! Don't tell her about that!"

"Yuuna-san told us about herself, so now we need to tell her about you, Wakaba-chan."

"Again, why me and not you!?"

"Right, right, so, Wakaba-chan was incredibly popular with underclassman girls, you see. She even had a fan club..."



"What!? Not even I knew about that!"

"... Heheh, ahahah."

Yuuna smiled awkwardly as she watched Wakaba quarrel with Hinata.

Even as they left the beach and walked back to Marugame Castle, the girls talked about many things and laughed together. They spoke about nothing important in particular, but they enjoyed themselves nonetheless.

"Yuuna. From now on, feel free to talk about anything that's on your mind. Even if it might make me mad. Even if it'll get us arguing. Because at the end of the day, a friend is still a friend. Some things will never change. That's what I believe."

"Yes, I agree. ... It's nice and refreshing to be open like this."

"Yeah. Thanks, Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan."

Three long shadows walked side by side under the setting sun.

They would never lose another friend again-- that was their wish.

And before long--  
the Vertexes invaded Shikoku.

Amidst the forestized land of Shikoku stood just two heroes capable of fighting.

Wakaba and Yuuna stood upon the castle walls of Marugame Castle's inner citadel, gazing at the swarm of Vertexes coming in from beyond the barrier.

Several giant Vertexes stood out among the sea of countless common Vertexes.

"Looks like... six giant Vertexes in total, huh."

"That huge one we saw near the Seto Ohashi Bridge isn't around, huh."

"Indeed. Maybe it isn't complete yet...?"

The six giant Vertexes invading Shikoku were each around the same size as the scorpion-type Vertex they previously encountered.

"But that's convenient in its own way. Let's start off by defeating these six to chip down their forces.

That way we'll be able to deal with that colossal Vertex if and when it appears."

"Yeah! So for now, we just gotta take down three of these guys each. Welp, let's get to it."



This would be the final battle. Wakaba and Yuuna had nothing to hold back.

The invading Vertexes immediately began corroding the Jukai.

The two girls shut their eyes and concentrated.

They traced the hero power dwelling within them back to its source, accessing the Shinju's conceptual record. From there, they extracted the power of the fairies to imbue their bodies with.

"Come forth-- Shuten-Doji!"

"Descend-- Daitengu!"

Yuuna imbued herself with the avatar of unrivaled power, the demon king, "Shuten-Doji", the only force to have defeated a giant Vertex in battle thus far. Yuuna's hero outfit transformed. Her personal weapon, her tekko gloves, grew huge. Her strengthened tekko could smash through perhaps any opposing force.

Wakaba on the other hand imbued herself with the great demon rivaling the gods, the Maen king, "Daitengu", who in legend burned the heavenly world to ash in one night. Wakaba's hero outfit transformed. Giant jet-black wings sprouted from her back.

Shuten-Doji, Daitengu-- imbued with the superhuman power of these two beings, the two girls opened their eyes to turn them towards the predators who sought destruction of the human world. The advance squadron of common Vertexes was the first to reach Marugame Castle. But they were no challenge to the heroes who had been fighting such common enemies for over a year.

With each swing of Yuuna's fist and each slash of Wakaba's sword, the common Vertexes fell one after the other. More accurately, Yuuna's fists shattered dozens of common enemies with each strike. Even the projectile firing enemies were no difficulty: Wakaba cut them down instantaneously using the overwhelming mobility her new wings afforded her.

Power and speed. The two complimented each other's shortcomings as the pair of heroes efficiently whittled the enemy away.

Suddenly, one of the six approaching giant Vertexes burrowed underground.

"!? It's moving underground...!?"

Wakaba cut down enemies with her sword in one hand as she checked the giant Vertex's movements on her smartphone map. The burrowing enemy was headed for--

"The Shinju, huh?"

"Wakaba-chan, I'll take care of the one underground!"

Yuuna jumped off the inner citadel castle walls.

"Yeah, go for it. I'll stop these enemies in their tracks!"



After seeing Yuuna off, Wakaba was attacked by other giant Vertexes. A long-bodied Vertex divided into countless joints, and a Vertex with demonic bull-like horns. The two monsters charged at the comparatively tiny Wakaba. It was an overly simple attack, but the sheer difference in scale meant a corresponding difference in power and stamina. A single direct hit would pulverize the girl's body beyond recognition--

Or it would if it weren't for the fact that Wakaba's current mobility made evading such an attack a non-issue. After evading the attack in one second, Wakaba glared at the predators with her sword in hand.

"This is the end for you, you monsters."

After seeing Wakaba evade the giant Vertexes' attack, Yuuna breathed a sigh of relief.

(Wakaba-chan will be fine-- I know it.)

With that conviction in mind, Yuuna chased after the large underground Vertex. It was rapidly approaching the Shinju moment by moment, but it wouldn't surface at all.

"Uugh, I can't get it unless it comes out...! At this rate, the Shinju's done for..."

If a Vertex were to destroy the Shinju, Shikoku too would be destroyed.

"In that case... it's time for the last resort!!"

Yuuna pounded the surface of the ground where the Vertex was moving. Her fist shook the earth, leaving a crater, but the enemy still would not surface.

"Rohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

With intense speed and power, Yuuna continued pounding the ground. The earth rumbled continuously. The dirt warped and caved. And eventually, part of the hidden Vertex surfaced.

Yuuna's fists finally landed direct hits on the Vertex, smashing into it. But the Vertex still tried to continue on its way.

"Why you little!!"

Yuuna grabbed the fin-like portion of the giant Vertex and forcefully pulled it out of the ground.

Now that the giant Vertex was fully exposed, Yuuna readied her finishing blow--

But couldn't land it.

Before Yuuna could swing her fist, a giant white band knocked her away.

"Waugh!"

Yuuna's body slammed into the ground. The giant band was part of another giant Vertex... a deformed Vertex with a swollen abdomen. Yuuna was too preoccupied with the underground Vertex to notice the other enemy approaching.

The deformed Vertex fired egg-shaped bomb-like objects out of its swollen abdomen. Yuuna was too disoriented from the band attack to evade and took a direct hit. Yuuna's body flew through the air like leaves in autumn.

"Agh... ugh..."

Beaten and battered, Yuuna fell prostrate on one of the Jukai's giant vines.

(Huh... my... body... won't... move...)

Her vision grew dark.

In her narrowing field of view, she saw three giant Vertexes heading through the air towards the Shinju. The burrowing Vertex she failed to defeat, the deformed Vertex with the swollen abdomen, and a Vertex surrounded by countless rod-like objects. At this rate, they would reach the Shinju and destroy Shikoku.

Yuuna's entire body was enveloped in crippling agony as a result of taking a direct hit from a Vertex attack as well as the kickback from using the superhuman power of Shuten-Doji.

(I've had... enough...)

Suddenly, everything seemed ridiculous to her. She felt intense resentment and indignation.

Why must she continue to fight while in such agony?

She resented the adults who tried to make her fight. She resented the Vertexes. She detested the very world itself for being broken.

The world was already ending. Was there even any point in protecting to the point of an agonizing death?

(I'm such an idiot... Fighting through such pain, such agony... Gun-chan, Tama-chan, An-chan... I don't even know what I'm fighting for anymore... being a hero is nothing but pain... and suffering... Why...)

Her heart filled with resentment at the incomprehensible, Yuuna lost consciousness.

--What am I fighting for?

"Because I'm a hero of course!! That's enough reason for me!"

Yuuna raised her voice, mustered all the strength in her body, and stood up.

She had only lost consciousness for a fleeting moment.



"I just had... a really bad thought again..."

That was the kickback from using such an overwhelmingly powerful fairy like Shuten-Doji. For just a moment, her mind was taken over by dark emotions. Ever since she first started using Shuten-Doji, such negative emotions would linger on.

"Just look at Wakaba-chan... she's trying her hardest..."

She could see Wakaba fighting in the distance, surrounded by Stardust and giant Vertexes. Three of the giant Vertexes were heading for the Shinju. Wakaba was fighting the remaining three. She was in no position to help Yuuna, nor to protect the Shinju.

Only Yuuna could protect the Shinju now.

"Ugh, uuugh...."

Her body was heavy.

Her eyes hazy.

Her head groggy.

But she was still alive. She could still move.

Shuten-Doji's power was still imbued within Yuuna's body.

In that case, she just had to grit her teeth and keep getting up, no matter how many times she fell.

"I...!"

Yuuna shouted.

"I... Takashima Yuuna, love everyone----!"

Her parents, who gave birth to her and raised her.

Her old friends, who played with her in kindergarten and elementary school.

The shinto priests, whom she met at the shrine in her childhood.

The citizens of Shikoku.

The staff at udon restaurants.

The fishermen of the Seto Inland Sea.

The farmers.

The workers in the shopping district.

Shiratori Utano and Fujimori Mito of Suwa.

And finally-- Nogi Wakaba, Uesato Hinata, Koori Chikage, Doi Tamako, and Iyojima Anzu.

She had lived only fourteen years of her life, but she had met many people. Even in a ruined world on the brink of despair, so many people had lived life to the fullest. Even if every single individual wasn't a bastion of virtue, everyone at least tried their hardest.

The strong. The weak. The gentle. The afraid. The brave. The bright. The dark. The intelligent. The athletic. The honest. The stubborn. The hotblooded. The coolheaded.

Yuuna acknowledged the efforts of all who tried to live in this era-- and she loved them all.

"So I'll protect this world... to the very enddddd!"

Yuuna kicked off the ground and leapt toward the three giant Vertexes heading towards the Shinju.

They were already near it.

Yuuna prioritized the one she had failed to defeat the first time. The enemy detected Yuuna's approach and tried to burrow again, but Yuuna's attack was too fast. She concentrated all her remaining strength into her fist and struck.

"Rohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

With one blow, she smashed into the giant Vertex's body.

And with her remaining momentum, Yuuna closed her distance to the other two.

She approached the deformed Vertex with the swollen abdomen and tried to smash her fist into it, but the third Vertex intercepted it by generating a reflective plate from its floating rod. The plate was hard enough to stop Yuuna's fist which had smashed through the other giant Vertexes.

But Yuuna didn't give up.

"You monsters stole so much from us! That ends today!!"

She kept punching the reflective plate.

The hero Takashima Yuuna's tekko were imbued with a spiritual power named "Amano Sakate [heaven's reversed hand]". A curse set forth by a land god prince upon his murder by a god of heaven.

The embodiment of his rage. His hatred, resentment, and chagrin for heaven and his desire to destroy.

The land god curse imbued in Yuuna's tekko corroded heaven-associated beings, leading to their collapse.

On the day the Vertexes first invaded, Yuuna was evacuating when she found those tekko in that familiar shrine. She has been fighting with those weapons imbued with divine power ever since.





The reflective plate blocking Yuuna's fist cracked and shattered. But it didn't end with just that plate. More reflective plates came to take its place to block Yuuna's attacks.

"No matter how many times it takes--"

Yuuna kept pounding with her fists. Though they were protected by the tekko, the kickback from Shuten-Doji's power was crumbling her hands. Blood spurted into the air from underneath the tekko.

But Yuuna didn't stop attacking.

Eventually she shattered all the reflective plates and her fists reached the giant Vertex's main body.

"We'll get up and try again! That's what makes us humaaaaan!!"

Yuuna pulverized the giant Vertex's main body in one attack.

In the unexpected delay the reflective plate Vertex caused, the remaining giant Vertex had reached the Shinju. The enemy launched an egg-shaped bomb from its swollen abdomen, but a transparent protective wall formed around the Shinju, negating the attack. Realizing that long-distance attacks were ineffective, the giant Vertex approached closer.

"Heroooo Puuuuuuunch!!"

Yuuna chased after the giant Vertex and drove her fist into it. Due to her overexertion throughout the battle, Yuuna's arms were broken and blackened from internal bleeding, her hands horrific lumps of blood and flesh. Normally it'd be impossible to even form fists in that state. It was nothing short of a miracle that Yuuna could keep fighting.

Yuuna's fist smashed the giant Vertex's abdomen with a single punch.

The enemy swung its white band and flung Yuuna away. Yuuna slammed against a Jukai vine and spat out large volumes of dark red blood. She had ruptured several internal organs. But without stopping for a moment, Yuuna lunged once more at the giant Vertex.

"I am!! The hero! Takashima Yuunaaaaaa!!"

Yuuna's fist pierced the giant Vertex's white band and smashed into its main body. The giant Vertex let out an eldritch scream and disintegrated.

Three down. She had defeated all of the giant Vertexes approaching the Shinju.

After using up the last of her strength, Yuuna fell to the ground.

By the Shinju's roots.

Neither the common Vertexes, nor any of the other three giant Vertexes approached the Shinju. Not a single one. Perhaps Wakaba had defeated them all.

Way to go, Wakaba-chan-- Yuuna silently praised the friend she trusted more than anyone else.



Yuuna could neither get up, nor even move a single finger.

Her vision went dark.

If she were to close her eyes now, they would probably never open again.

Just then, she felt a warmth envelop her body. It was a strange sensation, as if something were melting into her.

(Shinju... sama...? Am I... going inside... the Shinju-sama...?)

But strangely enough, she felt no fear.

(Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan... We didn't want to lose another friend... But I'm sorry... it doesn't look like I can keep up that promise...)

But she was glad.

Glad that she could protect everyone.

Yuuna smiled in relief as she let her consciousness slip one last time.

(Chapter 18 END)